FIFTY YEARS AFTER.

FIFTY YEARS AFTER:

A Tale in Verse.

BY

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Norwich:
G. S. HANCHETT,
HAYMARKET.
1880.

DEDICATED TO

JOHN BELL, ESQ.

PREFACE.

"WOULD not this be a subject for your pen?" Thus wrote to me the kind friend to whom this poem is dedicated, and so fast does time fly, that I find myself wondering this evening, whether it can indeed be a year since I read his letter from which the following sketch is drawn.

A chamois hunter, who has been engaged from early childhood to a young Swiss maiden, seeks an interview with his love, and entreats her to fix the wedding day, which she, loving much, and little loth agrees to do, on the one condition, that Rudolph shall renounce the dangerous chase. Vainly she urges him; her astonished lover cannot believe her in earnest, and to all her entreaties replies by half-laughing reproaches.

"Would she have him stay at home and spin?" he asks; or, "Would she like the village maidens to mock at her love?" Well has Rudolph chosen his weapons! Annette, fired by his enthusiasm, yields, and bids him go; his mountain maid will welcome his return at their favourite trysting place, and the wedding shall take place the next day. Enchanted by this double consent, and led away by love and admiration for his beautiful Alpine bride, Rudolph promises after this one more hunting expedition to lead a less dangerous life; and so they part, happy in their love and youth.

Next morn Rudolph's jödel call tells Annette, that her lover is even now ascending the mountains to track the fleet chamois. At eventide Annette keeps her tryst, but where is the lover who should meet her there? Alas! he comes not! Twilight deepens into night, but Rudolph comes no more. Vain is Annette's anguish, and vain the efforts of the bravest hunters in the little village, for a storm has burst ere their search can be begun, an avalanche wipes out all traces of his fate, and on her wedding morn Annette

is left a widowed bride. In her frenzy of grief she escapes from home and wildly seeks Rudolph, but is followed and brought back senseless and half dead. So closes the first page of a sad tragedy.

Ten years later we find the Alpine maiden still faithful to her lost love, and keeping on this day the anniversary of his death. To his memory she has vowed herself, and no man may win Rudolph's bride, though many would fain do so, for ten years have but matured her beauty. To the Curé's prayers and entreaties that she will devote herself to good works, will enter the convent, and so shut out all earthly troubles, she but answers: "The convent is no place for me;" and so impressed is the kind old man by her determination, that his wish gives way to her will, and Annette is left to carry out her vow. But even now a change in her life is coming. A rich lover, who has wooed her in vain, dies and bequeaths to her his fortune, asking her to found with it a home for the sick and poor. This our Annette does, and as her thoughts are thus led away from her own sorrow to the contemplation of the sufferings of others, so,

though still faithful in heart and life to the lost Rudolph, she becomes insensibly resigned to her lot, and, loved and loving, moves onward in God's own appointed path.

Fifty years have now elapsed since that sad day which should have been the wedding day, and the lovely Alpine maiden has become an aged woman, still beautiful even in decay. Throughout her native land her name resounds, and never is it spoken without a blessing, for to all who have needed aid have her heart and her hand been open. The distribution of Ulric's bequest has been, under Providence, the means of arousing Annette's gentle sympathies from the lethargy of sorrow into which she had fallen at the shock of Rudolph's death, and now, the day far spent and the evening at hand, she waits God's good time to take her home.

But another page in her life is yet unturned. For some little time past the glacier has been creeping onwards, and making inroads on the valley. The villagers anxiously watch, and whilst watching recall the old days, and speak of Rudolph, Annette's lover,

the bravest chamois hunter the hamlet ever knew. Suddenly one evening, while kneeling in the little chapel, Annette is startled and alarmed by the noise of voices in the distance, and hurrying forth, she hears that "Rudolph is found."

Leading the little throng of sympathizing villagers, she seeks the spot indicated, and there at the foot of the glacier the lovers meet again. But Annette is now an aged woman; her once graceful form bowed with age, her hair white as the mountain peaks, her cheeks pallid with anxiety; and Rudolph—what of him? There he lies, the long lamented, young as when she saw him last, young and fair. Well may the shock of such a meeting shake the aged brain, well may she ask what lying tale has brought her here. "This is not Rudolph!" Then as the truth slowly dawns on her, she says:

> "But once my Rudolph looked like this. 'Twas when
> "We wandered for the last time through the glen,"

and with one heartrending cry she falls beside her long-lost dead.

The end has come at last, and though Annette survives for a few short hours, the lovers are laid in one grave three days afterwards, never again to be divided.

This then is the foundation on which I have built my poem, and fain would I hope, that it may prove not unacceptable to all faithful lovers, setting before them as it does, the constancy of a true woman's love.

It only now remains for me to give the name of the friend, to whose kindly interest in my poems I owe this story, and to whom, therefore, I dedicate it. The name is, I think, familiar to many in Norwich and Norfolk: did not Norfolk herself give birth to J. BELL, the Poet-Sculptor of Kensington?

DRAYTON RECTORY,
January, 1880.

FIFTY YEARS AFTER.

BOOK I.

THE LOVERS' TRYST.

I.

'Tis sunset. See, on high the crimson glow,
Which, like a royal mantle, doth enfold
The lone hill tops, while softly far below
Fall the grey hues of twilight, calm and cold.
The pine trees rustle on the summer air,
The mountains melt away into the sky,
The shadowy vapours veil the landscape fair,
And swift, yet smooth, the river ripples by.

II.

Watching its current as it flowed along,
A maiden stood beneath th' o'erspreading trees,
And listened to the burden of its song,
That rose and fell upon the wandering breeze.
Fair was she, with long plaits of sunny hair
Which shone like red gold 'neath the sun's bright rays,
Dark blue her eye, undimmed as yet by care,
Yet was there something in its earnest gaze
Which seemed with deep, prophetic meaning fraught.
Swift as the fawn's her step; true Alpine maid,
Unspoiled by looks, by beauteous nature taught,
A mountain flower which blossomed in the shade.

III.

Long did she linger. Soft winds gently stirred
The stately tree-tops; sweetly scented flowers
Breathed forth rich odours, whilst from far she heard
The convent clock which chimed the passing hours.
The mountain raised its snow-clad crest on high
And in the moonlight glittered cold and bright;
The maiden turned and faintly breathed a sigh:
"'Tis late; perchance he cannot come to-night!"

IV.

"My hunter love! who for my sake dost fear
"No danger, thou art all the world to me;
"Oh! would that I, thy jödel call could hear,
"Thy flashing eye, thy manly form could see!
"With aching gaze, I scan the mountains high,
"Yet of their solemn grandeur little see,
"For Rudolph's safety only do I sigh,
"For it my God implore on bended knee."
Then swift she sought the village, shaded o'er
By hoary hills, with pine woods darkly crowned.
Passing the little convent's friendly door
She reached the châlet—and her lover found.

V.

Rudolph his name: a chamois hunter bold,
Yet, with his Annette, gentle as the kiss
Which mothers press on nestling babes they hold
Close to the hearts which overflow with bliss.
Fleet was his footstep in the dang'rous chase,
Rarely the chamois 'scaped his steady aim,
Whilst happy smiles which beamed on Annette's face
But made him eager for still greater fame.

VI.

From childhood's days betrothed, both young, both fair,
Daily they seemed to grow in strength and grace,
As wild flowers, knowing naught of mortal care,
Blossom unheeded, in some lonely place.
Swift sped the years, and Rudolph comes to-night,
Half shy with lover's fears, half full of pride,
To claim a promise made in dim twilight,
And fix the day should make Annette his bride.

VII.

With love soft shining in her deep blue eyes
Fair Annette listened to her lover's tale;
Her bosom heaving oft with tender sighs
Her cheek now flushed, anon transparent pale.
He, eager urged his suit: a speedy day
On which to call her his; he clasped her hand
And kneeling did in fervent accents pray
That she would make him happiest in the land.

VIII.

"Not mine the fault, Annette," he gladly cried,
"That thou so long has waited in the vale;
"Fain had I been, my true love, by thy side
"Yet could not leave the chamois' long-sought trail.

"Thou know'st, beloved, my heart and soul are thine,
"Say, wilt thou shelter 'neath a husband's care?
"To-night I come to claim thy hand as mine,
"For thee, and thee alone, I perils dare."

IX.

"Rudolph," she answered, "well thou know'st my heart
"Is thine. Since first we were betrothed, my life
"Has owed its sweetness to thy care; thou art
"My heart's best treasure. I will be thy wife
"When best thou deem'st it. But, wilt thou resign
"For me the dangers of the chase? Ah! no,
"I see thy dark eyes flash and shrink from mine;
"My own! my love! I dare not let thee go!"

X.

So spoke th' impassioned maid, and Rudolph heard,
Yet hearing, seemed like one new-waked from sleep.
Amazed he stood, nor spoke a single word,
Which Annette marked, and marking could but weep.
Then, with a mighty quiver through his frame,
The stalwart hunter stood before his love;
"Weep not," he cried, "is Rudolph then to blame?
"Would'st have thy falcon turned to woodland dove?

XI.

"Would'st have my comrades mock thy Rudolph, aye?
"And bid me spin, since I no longer dare
"The mountain height, the torrent swift, but fly
"The glacier stern, the chamois' secret lair?
"Would'st have the maidens point at me with scorn
"And whisper tales of Annette's foolish fears?
"Better than that had Rudolph ne'er been born,
"Wipe then away, my Alpine rose, these tears.

XII.

"'Tis for thy sake I climb the mountain steep,
"And in thine honour fain would go once more,
"That I our wedding feast may gaily keep
"And with my earnings swell the bridegroom's store.
"But once more sweetheart: then within our vale
"Rudolph will toil for thee, his well-loved wife,
"No longer shall thy gentle face turn pale,
"For thy dear sake I'll leave the hunter's life.

XIII.

"What! trembling still? My Annette, list to me,
"Lay thy dear head upon my faithful breast;
"I cannot bear those kind eyes dimmed to see,
"Fain would I lay thy woman's fears to rest.

"So true my love, Annette, for thee I'd dare
"All dangers, nay, my life itself resign,
"But not my honour; that would bring despair;
"And misery then were my sad lot and thine.

XIV.

"Look up and smile, my mountain-maid, for sore
"My heart is longing for one word of love,
"Give Rudolph leave to go but this once more
"And scale the snowy heights which tower above.
"For thy sweet sake would I were blest with gold,
"That I might lay it all at thy dear feet;
"Then would'st thou give thy chamois hunter bold
"One little smile from lips so soft and sweet."

XV.

Stirred by her lover's words the maiden rose
And dashed the tear-drop from her glistening eyes,
"Rudolph," she cried, "when I my lover chose,
"The village said my choice was good and wise.
"No more from Annette's lips regrets shall fall,
"No more in fear for thee my heart shall quail.
"In losing thee, thou knowest, I'd lose my all,
"And knowing this thy footstep will not fail.

XVI.

"Go forth, beloved, and track the chamois fleet,
"Where swift it bounds with footsteps light and free,
"And I will come my hunter love to meet
"When thou in safety home return'st to me.
"For thy dear sake lone hours Annette will bear,
"Nor strive to keep thee by her side with tears,
"Since for a woman's love all things men dare,
"A woman's love shall conquer woman's fears.

XVII.

"And now, farewell, my Rudolph, shades of night
"Are falling softly, haste thee to thy home;
"The stars are gleaming, by their silvery light
"Safe may thy footsteps by the river roam.
"Farewell, beloved; yet, oh! one moment stay,
"This amulet for my sake wilt thou wear?
"And think, when thou art wandering far away
"That Annette trusts thee to our Father's care.

XVIII.

"To-morrow's sun will see my Rudolph breast
"The mountain height, the glacier stern and cold,
"And when he sinks into the golden west,
"Annette will meet her chamois hunter bold."

One fond embrace, in which heart spoke to heart,
Then Rudolph sped the mountain path along,
And Annette, sadly watching him depart,
Caught the soft echo of her lover's song.

Song.

Upon our wedding morn
  No gems my bride may wear,
Save wreath of Edelweiss,
  Amid her glossy hair.

What fears a hunter bold,
  Who loves an Alpine lass,
The glacier's ice-cold peak,
  The treacherous crevasse?

From crag to crag I'll spring,
  No chamois half so fleet,
The Edelweiss to pluck,
  And lay at her dear feet.

Its snowy hue is not
  Purer than my love's life;
No other gem she'll wear
  The morn I call her wife.

XIX.

Not yet o'er Alpine hills the morning ray
Brightly had flashed, when up the rugged track
Our Annette watched her lover take his way,
Then wistful pause and towards her home look back.
She heard the jödel, dear to Alpine maid,
With aching heart and quickly filling eye,
Then swift her loving heart's fond wish obeyed,
With answering call she gave him fond reply.

XX.

Alone the stalwart hunter took his way,
With heart quick beating, pulses throbbing fast;
Good luck he felt would be his lot that day,
Annette at eve should smile o'er perils past.
"'Tis for her sake I climb the slippery height,
"Nor shun the cruel glacier's ice-cold side,
"The Edelweiss with blossoms pure and white
"Must crown my long-loved gentle Alpine bride."

XXI.

Once more he turns, Annette is watching still;
The stars are fading in the morning sky,
And happy thoughts brave Rudolph's bosom fill
To overflowing, low he breathes a sigh.

"How fair she looked," he mused, "but yesternight!
"How sweet to think for me those tears were shed;
"Well may I call my true love 'Heart's-delight,'
"Blest shall I be the morn that we are wed."

XXII.

So musing, Rudolph passed from Annette's sight:
Silent she stood, with face grown strangely pale:
"Gone!" her lips murmured, "was it yesternight
"I said to him my courage should not fail?
"O Rudolph! God preserve thee to my love;
"Would I could now thy rapid steps recall!
"What sound is that which echoes from above?
"Silence! sad heart, 'tis my love's jödel call."

Song.

Thou art gone away, O my hunter love,
  Gone to the eagle's home,
And thine Alpine maid at her wheel must spin
  Whilst afield doth her lover roam,

O'er the snowy crags thy step now bounds,
  Like the chamois swift and free,
From the glacier pale and the deep crevasse
  Thou wilt come at eve to me.

Thou wilt bring me a gift of an Alpine rose
  To wear in my breast with pride,
And a snowy wreath of the Edelweiss,
  A crown for thine Alpine bride.

XXIII.

'Tis eve; and Annette keeps her tryst; not here
The love she comes to meet? Her blue eyes gaze,
Piercing the shadows as they creep more near,
And much she marvels why her lover stays.
Silent she waiting stands in that lone spot
With ear attent to catch the jödel call,
And wonders why the hunter sounds it not,
And why such shadows o'er the mountains fall.

XXIV.

Vainly she waits, starting at every sound.
No sign her lover makes, no answering tone
Echoes her call, chill twilight reigns around,
And Annette stands in anguish deep—alone.
Fearful she cries: " My Rudolph where art thou?
" Annette is waiting, come back to thy love!"
Naught hears she save some breaking forest bough,
Or wild bird screeching from the heights above.
Then from her pallid lips there fell
Upon the chilly air,
A bitter cry of anguish deep,
The utterance of despair

XXV.

Prone on the ground she lay: " O vanished love
" Come back! soon will awake our wedding morn;
" Leave then these treacherous crags which frown above,
" Annette is waiting, watching here forlorn.
" Why do I weep? Of what avail these tears?
" Swift to the châlet now my steps shall fly,
" Perchance he mocks me, playing with my fears
" Whilst I, ah! coward heart, but weep and sigh."

XXVI.

Alas! poor Annette, stay thy hastening feet,
Pause at the door! Sorrow comes aye too soon!
Not here the love thou fondly hop'st to meet,
Cold now, the heart that beat so warm at noon.
There by the hearth, dozing till Annette came,
Her mother slept the dreamless sleep of age,
The candle threw its dim and flickering flame
Upon her Bible's worn and open page.

XXVII.

Mournful was Annette's soul, wild was the night,
Slow dragged the hours their weary course along,
She, bowed in bitterest grief, marked not their flight,
Nor heard her mother pray her to be strong.
"Not lost, O God! not lost," her constant moan,
"Will this long, gloomy night ne'er have an end?
"Rudolph! come back, thy true love weeps alone,
"Oh! quick return! Thy footsteps homeward bend."

XXVIII.

At last the night was over. Daylight broke
And showed the mountains towering to the sky;
In Annette's grief-struck heart fresh hope awoke,
And to the village, swift her footsteps fly.

What mean the anxious looks she meets? The tears
From eyes that have no cause, she thinks, to weep?
Rudolph is safe! with night have fled her fears,
The chase was long, his tryst this morn he'll keep.

XXIX.

From friend to friend she turned. Will no one speak.
What means this awful stillness in the air,
Which dries all hue of life from Annette's cheek
And seems to freeze her heart's blood with despair?
What means the mist which lowers like a pall
And shuts the mountain from her aching sight?
Where yesterday she heard the jödel call,
Now sounds the Lauwine, pealing from the height.

XXX.

The storm is on them, through the pine wood drear
The wild wind whistles with a mournful tone,
With glazing eye and heart convulsed with fear
Poor Annette heard and made her piteous moan.
The avalanche's hollow roar she heard,
The glacier's crack, the torrent's rapid flow;
With failing strength and limbs that feebly stirred
She watched the storm in fury rise and grow.

XXXI.

Whispering, the neighbours watched her drooping form,
Small hope for Rudolph in their bosoms reigned,
No man alive could face that awful storm,
Nor dared they seek him till its fury waned.
At last, an old man gently led her home,
Speaking kind words which never reached her ear,
Ever she murmured: "Rudolph far doth roam,
"His jödel call poor Annette cannot hear."

XXXII.

The lightning shone, and blinding was its glare,
The thunder crashed, appalling was the sound,
More and more sultry grew the heated air,
Whilst thick black clouds in masses rolled around.
Up-rooted trees in numbers prostrate lay,
The river roared along its rocky course
O'erflowing banks upon its headlong way,
Naught could avail against its reckless force.

XXXIII.

The storm raged on all through the livelong day,
And Annette, waiting, maddened by her fear,
Wept scalding tears and strove in vain to pray.
Whilst to each sound she strained her anxious ear,

And ever darker did the horror grow
That Rudolph never more to her would come,
That when the storm was o'er, the waters low,
Long might she call, still would his voice be dumb.

Song.

Again the Alpine rose may bloom,
  The chamois wander free,
But my lost love, my hunter-lad,
  Will ne'er return to me.

No bridal wreath of Edelweiss
  Annette will ever wear,
Lost is the lover who for me
  Crevasse or crag would dare,

No more, alas! the jödel call
  Upon the air will sound,
Unhurt by Rudolph's bullet sure
  The chamois far may bound.

The mountains' snowy peaks will rear
  Their proud crests to the skies,
And stars will shine, as brightly shone
  For me my lover's eyes.

XXXIV.

Thus Annette sang, unheeding what she said;
Anon her music took another strain,
So mournful that her mother's heart sore bled,
And from her aged eyes dropped tears of pain.
"Annette," she cried, "my heart's-joy, grieve not so,
"At noon the hunter-lads Rudolph will find."—
No answer, but the sad voice echoing low:
"At noon the hunter-lads Rudolph will find."

Song.

All through the valley
Sounds the death knell,
Softly it murmurs:
My Annette, farewell!
Where art thou, Rudolph?
Where is thy grave?
Did my love perish,
No one to save?
Come to me, Rudolph,
See how I weep!
Lonely I waited,
No tryst did'st thou keep.

Come to me, dear one,
To-morrow we wed,
Yet the death knell is ringing
The bridegroom lies dead!

XXXV.

So sang Annette with fevered, o'erwrought brain,
All through the weary day, the wearier night;
And still the wind raged on, still fell the rain,
Till morning dawned and brought the cheerful light.
Then from the little village went a band
Of hunters; up the mountain path they sped
With rapid feet, the bravest of the land,
Yet now, each heart seemed weighted as with lead.

XXXVI.

Vainly they search through lonely caves on high,
And sound the jödel call, but sound in vain;
No Rudolph's voice is heard in glad reply,
'Tis but the wind which echoes back the strain.
From morn till eve they search but find no trace
Of the lost Rudolph; then towards home at last
They turn, with heavy heart and mournful face;
Too well they know, for Rudolph hope is past.

XXXVII.

With drooping heads and lips that breathed no song,
By the steep path which to the village led,
The hunters came and marked th' excited throng
Which gathered by the river's rocky bed.
And Annette? Ah! beneath the pine trees' shade,
Unheeding all around, with startled eyes,
And pallid death-struck face, the hapless maid
Sinks on the ground, and hopeless, senseless lies.

XXXVIII.

Through the green valley now
The Alpine hunters tread,
Where the dark pine branches wave,
As if to mourn the dead.
By th' ivied church they pass,
Where rest the loved and brave,
And they whisper sad and low:
"Not here may be his grave,
"Where the eagle woos the sky,
"Where the chamois bounds at will,
"There doth the hunter lie,
"In sleep all calm and still.
"No more will he climb with speed
"The glacier's side in glee,

"In peace may the roebuck feed
"From our brother's bullet free.
"Woe for the maid we bear
"Back to her home forlorn,
"Woe for her soul's despair,
"And woe for her bridal morn.
"Well may her cheek turn pale,
"And the love-light leave her eye,
"None dreamt that his step could fail,
"That our hunter king could die.
"No more shall his footsteps tread
"Where the chamois free doth dwell,
"Our chief he's among the dead,
"And the wild wind rings his knell."

XXXIX.

On to her quiet home the hunters passed
Bearing the stricken maid; no sign of life
She gave, save when they reached her house at last,
Then low she muttered: "Rudolph! Annette, wife!
"Mother, make haste, soon will the morn appear;
"The bridegroom waits, swift let the meal be spread.
"What sounds of weeping fall upon mine ear?
"*Smiles* for a wedding! *Tears* are for the dead!"

Song.

Far o'er the mountains
  With face full of glee,
Rudolph is waiting,
  Waiting for me.

Haste love, nor linger,
  My heart sore doth yearn,
Long hast thou left me,
  Soon, love, return!

In the morn, love, thou knowest
  We two shall be wed—
The death knell is tolling!
  Who mourn for their dead?

XL.

All silent lay the village hushed in sleep,
When, hurrying through the pine wood's sombre gloom,
A maiden passed, an early tryst to keep—
Or, was her quest a hapless lover's tomb?
The wild winds moaned, the fir trees murmured: "Stay,"
But, heedless of their call, she hurried by,
Climbing the rocks which in her pathway lay,
Whispering as swift she went: "I too would die!"

XLI.

In the still vale below, the mother slept,
Worn out with grief, with heart that inly bled,
And eyes that bitter tears since morn had wept
As she recalled the memory of her dead.
Long did she sleep, dreaming of her first love,
And in her sleep, becoming young once more,
Nor heard a movement in the room above,
Nor marked the opening of the châlet door.

XLII.

At last she woke, woke with a gentle sigh,
And gazed around: "Annette!" she called, "art here?
"Speak to me, darling, on my bosom lie,
"What means this silence? what this sudden fear?"
Still silent—not one sound the mother hears,
And trembling, stricken, falls on bended knee.
Alas! what power can soothe a mother's fears?
Shuddering she thinks: "Where can my darling be?"

XLIII.

Soon is she dressed and off—her neighbours dwell
Remote and scattered; many suns have set
Since she has toiled so far; the convent bell
She sadly hears and feels a vain regret:

"Perchance," she sighed as wearily she trod,
The little track which to the village led,
"Had I but trusted more in Thee, my God,
"Not thus my only child had mourned her dead."

XLIV.

Thus musing, on she moved and reached at last
The village; trembling, choked by sobs and tears,
She told her grief to friends who gathered fast:
And every anxious face confirmed her fears.
"My child is gone!" Scarce hath the mother told
Her bitter sorrow, than the mountain side
Is thronged with seekers, young men strong and bold
Climb up the slippery path with rapid stride.

XLV.

And kindly women soothe with friendly tongue
The mother, urging: "She will soon be here;
"Rest thee, poor soul! still is the morning young,
"Perchance e'en now thy child is wandering near."
Silent the mother sat; no single word
She spoke, but fast her white lips moved in silent prayer;
The neighbours doubted if she even heard
Them speak, or saw them standing by her there.

XLVI.

Through the pinewood's gloomy shade,
Seek they now the Alpine maid,
'Mid the mountain's silent dells,
Search they long the hidden cells.
Softly now their footsteps tread
And they marvel: "Is she dead?
"Hath her lover's loss bereft
"Her of reason? Hath she left
"Home and us to find his tomb?
"God! preserve her from his doom!"

XLVII.

Where the Alpine rose in its glorious bloom
Glows near the glacier's stream,
Where the gentianella's dark blue eye
'Neath a cloudless sky doth beam,
Where the Edelweiss lures on the brave,
They found the maiden they came to save.
With the hue of death on her pallid cheek,
And her hand clasped on her breast,
She lay, like a flower the snow had crushed,
Or a wounded bird in its nest.

In vain had she sought for her hunter love
'Mid the crags which beetled high,
He was gone, and o'erwhelmed by her soul's despair,
She had lain her down to die.

XLVIII.

Homeward now the hunters go,
Marching solemnly and slow;
In their arms the maiden lay
Lifeless as a form of clay.
Scarce they hear the faintest breath
Giving hope: "This is not death."
Gloomy grows the sunny sky,
Mournful blasts come sweeping by;
Down the mountain's slippery track
Silently they bear her back,
Bear her—ah! poor heart forlorn,
Widowed ere her wedding morn!

BOOK II.

THE MAIDEN'S VOW.

I.

Whose form is this we see with outstretched hands,
And eyes that towards the mountains strain their gaze?
Who is it that in speechless grief now stands,
Nor heeds the fierceness of the sun's warm rays?
Untouched by time, nay, with an added grace,
Still beautiful, though grief oft dims her eye,
In that lone watcher Annette's self we trace,
And solve the meaning of her deep-drawn sigh.

II.

Ten winters now have slowly passed away,
Ten summers shone in all their transient bloom,
Since Annette woke upon that fatal day
Which changed her life and sealed her lover's doom.

Each day the maiden, struggling 'gainst her woe,
Had prayed for strength her heavy cross to bear,
And, in the quiet chapel, kneeling low,
Had cried to God to save her from despair.

III.

Her prayer was heard; and in her aching breast
New life awoke; slowly she grew resigned
To her life's cross and, bearing it, found rest,
For peace and sorrow often grow entwined.
Within her faithful breast his memory stayed,
Nor could long years the treasured past efface;
True love in loving souls can never fade,
Though grief perchance have left its lasting trace.

IV.

Through the long years for him fond tears were shed
As, musing of him oft, she set apart
The day which saw her lover with the dead,
The day which left her widowed in her heart.
With loving care she soothed her mother's life,
Till in death's arms her parent fell asleep.
To each who fain had woo'd her for his wife
She answer'd: "Faithful to my love I'll keep."

V.

Once more her vigil lone she now doth hold,
From early morn till in the purple west
The sun declines and sinks in clouds of gold,
Whilst weary toilers pause and take their rest.
Afar she hears the torrent's foaming wave,
The pine trees rustling in the summer air.
Oh ! could she but divine her lover's grave,
And, kneeling there, pour forth her fervent prayer !

VI.

"Where art thou ? oh ! my heart's beloved," she cried,
"Annette still mourns thee, still is desolate ;
"Thrice cruel fate which could our lives divide,
"And from my fond arms steal my chosen mate !
"Where art thou whom my spirit loved so well,
"Thou, on whose faithful and beloved breast,
"When aught to me in those old days befell,
"I turned in sorrow or in grief to rest ?

VII.

"Since then long years have passed in ceaseless round,
"Sad winter raged and sweet spring gaily smil'd
"O'er our fair valley, making hope rebound
"In every heart. Again the chamois wild

"From crag to crag, with bounding step has sped,
"To manhood sprung the laughing infant child,
"Yet never trace of my lost love is found
"In deep crevasse or torrent's rocky bed.

VIII.

"On thy lone grave, beneath the Alpine sky
"Annette, alas! her vigil may not keep;
"Unknown, unmarked by any mortal eye,
"Not e'en thy widowed bride may by it weep.
"Tempests o'er thee may burst in fury loud,
"They cannot hurt or rouse the blessed dead,
"The avalanche has wrapped thee in its shroud,
"The treacherous snow has proved thy bridal-bed.

IX.

"Oft 'mid the shadows as I linger here,
"Alone with God and thinking of my love,
"I seem to feel his spirit hovering near,
"Perchance he sees me from his home above.
"For me shall loving hands no myrtle twine,
"The hunter-lads still woo, but woo in vain;
"The heart that worships at a lost love's shrine,
"Is ill-attuned to list a wedding strain."

Song.

The mountain rose may bloom as fair
  As in long-vanished days,
But never more it looks the same
  To Annette's mournful gaze.

The pine trees rustle with the breeze,
  The river ripples near,
They but recall the visions fond
  Of one her heart held dear.

True love, loves one, and one enshrines
  Within love's faithful breast,
Her heart, her life to him she gives,
  Indifferent to the rest.

Cold as the glacier pale, all find
  Annette's once tender heart,
Vainly they woo, for all alike
  She coldly bids depart.

x.

Soft cloudlets mantled in the evening sky
And threw their shadows flickering on the ground,
The stately mountains towered far on high
Whilst Annette's footsteps through the village sound.

Sad were her thoughts, pensive her downcast mien,
As slow she moved, yet, when some kindly word
A neighbour spoke, upon her face was seen
A smile which told that joy her bosom stirr'd.

XI.

Quiet the little home where Annette long
Had dwelt; where, in the happy days of old
Her mother's heart she gladdened with her song;
When Rudolph all his hunting prowess told.
There had the Alpine maid in anguish prayed
Again and yet again, that from his grave
Some little token, howsoe'er delayed,
Might guide her to the spot where lay the brave.

Song.

O'er the grave where he sleeps
'Neath the clear Alpine sky,
The eagle at day-dawn
Is hovering nigh.
  Weep, Annette, weep,
  For too long doth he sleep!

Far peals the loud Lauwine,
Men tremble with fear,
No sound of it reaches
My lost lover's ear.
  Weep, Annette, weep,
  For too sound doth he sleep !

See ! the spring-flowers blossom
Above his true breast,
No fragrance can reach him
Where cold he doth rest.
  Weep, Annette, weep,
  Naught can rouse him from sleep !

XII.

She reaches home—home? where no friendly face
Her coming greets, and her light, graceful tread
Is welcome to no ear. She takes her place
'Mid ever-haunting mem'ries of the dead.
Why starts she now? Unseen by her before
(Her spirit rapt in one o'erwhelming thought),
A letter lies upon the cottage floor,
And in her face an instant change is wrought.

XIII.

Ah! wherefore does the pale cheek redden now?
Why does she tremble as with sudden dread?
Why mutter: "Rudolph! Annette's vow!"
This is no message-token from the dead.
Some thought of sorrow, dim and undefined
Seemed struggling in the maiden's heaving breast,
Some mystery unsolved disturbed her mind
And would not instantly be laid to rest.

XIV.

The letter in her trembling fingers lay,
And in its silence made a mute appeal,
"What fate" she murmured, "brings it here to-day?"
And sighing now she slowly broke the seal.
"Annette!" the letter ran, "how many years
"Wilt thou to Rudolph consecrate thy tears?
"Since his sad death, long years have glided past,
"And sorrow's hue should change to joy at last.
"Think, how in nature, e'en the darkest night
"Is o'er at last, forgot in day's fair light.
"Of what avail, when Rudolph silent lies,
"Annette, thy sorrow and thy heart-felt sighs?

"Dost think he knows the vigils lone you keep,
"Or sees the bitter tears you silent weep?
"Not so, God's will—His love would grant relief
"To every heart bowed down by crushing grief.
"But wrong Him not by spoiling thus thy life:
"Shake off this grief, and be my well-loved wife.
"Oft have I wooed thee, wooed alas! in vain,
"Yet still I come to plead my suit again.
"A happy home, a lover's faithful heart,
"Say, Annette, wilt thou bid me still depart?

"*Ulric.*"

XV.

The letter dropped from Annette's trembling hands
And on her face there fell a shade of pain,
With downcast eye, and dreamy look she stands
Murmuring: "Rudolph! I cannot love again!"
Then, all-unknowing what she did, bent low
And raised the letter, silent laid it by
And like one stricken by a heavy blow
Stole to her couch and dreamed of Rudolph nigh.

XVI.

Morn breaks, and Annette rises from her bed,
Soothed by her dream, refreshed by quiet rest,
In thankfulness her earnest prayers are said
And calmness fills the maiden's pious breast;
Gone are the anxious thoughts of yesternight
Dispersed as fade away soft clouds in June,
Or as black darkness merges into light
And tranquil morn gives place to glorious noon.

XVII.

Her simple toilet made, her breakfast o'er,
Awhile she watched with dreamy, ling'ring gaze,
The radiant mountains from the châlet door
Bathed in the glory of the sun's warm rays.
Then with slow steps, as if by thought delayed,
She took the letter, read it through once more,
And, musing as she wrote, short answer made,
Nor marked at first a low knock at the door.

XVIII.

Again the knock; and this time Annette hears,
And hearing, opens wide the cottage door
Brushing away with eager hand the tears
That fill her eyes and will perforce brim o'er.

Upon the threshold was the Curé. There,
Like some old picture, patiently he stands,
The sunlight playing on his silvery hair,
And stately figure and close-folded hands.

XIX.

Kind greeting gave he Annette.—Since the day
That saw her widowed ere she was a bride,
Oft had he prayed her all her load to lay
Upon God's altar, in God's priest confide.
E'en now he comes a last appeal to make,
He bids her choose a higher, holier sphere,
He tells her how God's children must forsake
All earthly joys and to His throne draw near.

XX.

"Daughter!" the stern voice urged, "in time beware;
"Make not an idol of thy grief—nay pray
"Lest Satan should have set for thee a snare
"To hide God's blessed will from thee this day.
"Such grief as thine, is passing strange in youth;
"Nay, do not turn from me in anger, child;
"I do but warn—I can but speak God's truth,
"And urge thee on to seek His mercy mild.

XXI.

"Yet think thee Annette, of the blessed life
"That I again would offer thee this morn;
"God willed it not that thou should'st be a wife,
"God wills it not that thou should'st be forlorn.
"What! weeping, maiden? dry those foolish tears,
"Not worthy are they of the higher life
"Where futile seem all anxious worldly fears
"That daunt men's spirits in the carnal strife.

XXII.

"Am I deceived my child? wilt thou resign
"The highest work that mortals do on earth?
"And wilt thou lay on love's extinguished shrine
"The precious gifts God gave thee at thy birth?
"Wilt thou spend years in mourning for thy love,
"Yet grudge to God the sultry noontide hour?
"Refuse the crown which saints will wear above,
"Deny the justice of God's mighty power?

XXIII.

"Within the quiet cell all worldly strife
"Is banished, grief replaced by heavenly joy;
"The bride of Christ there tastes of that pure life
"Emblem of yon true life where no alloy

"Can mingle; where the blessed ever stand
"Around His throne; where faith is crowned by sight;
"Where countless martyrs form a shining band
"And light is love, and love is perfect light.

XXIV.

"Once more, beware! In every mortal's life
"A moment comes when life or death we choose,
"A hollow peace, or else a glorious strife;
"We gain a crown, or heaven itself we lose.
"Daughter, renounce this life, with sorrow fraught,
"And seek the joys of heavenly peace divine;
"God's will, God's work, be now thy every thought,
"So shall God's blessing be for ever thine."

XXV.

The old man ceased—no answering voice he heard;
Annette stood by him, struggling, but in vain
To speak, for from her white lips came no word,
And o'er her calm brow passed a look of pain.
Again he spoke: "Daughter, oh! let us kneel,
"And for God's holy guidance humbly pray,
"He only reads what in their hearts men feel,
"He waits thy answer lovingly to-day."

XXVI.

Then knelt the Curé, knelt the maiden too,
And from the old priest's lips there solemn fell
A prayer to God, that of His mercy true,
To this His child His meaning He would tell.
That He would wean her heart from earth's frail love
And give her grace to lay it on His shrine,
That He would teach her heart to soar above
All worldly cares, and find the Love divine.

XXVII.

Meekly the maiden bowed her grief-weighed head
As in her heart sharp pangs of anguish stirred,
While aching wounds, deep probed, all fréshly bled
And in the quiet room a moan was heard.
Long did the old man pray that God would move
Her heart and bring her to His mercy-seat;
With claspèd hands and word of reverent love
For this poor wandering lamb he did entreat.

XXVIII.

The prayer was over, laid on God's fair shrine,
Where every sigh from hearts that trust His word
Is laid, yet still the maiden made no sign,
The Curé marvelled if she even heard.

"My child," the old man faltered, "has this prayer
"Not helped thee? Faith in the All-just is thine,
"I know; draw then still nearer to the eternal care
"And meekly yield thee to His love divine."

XXIX.

"Father!" she cried, "alas it cannot be!
"The cloistered convent may not shelter me;
"Annette's sad tones can never meetly share
"The vesper hymn, the softly chanted prayer.
"Still in my heart does fancy fondly burn
"For happy hours that never may return,
"Still must I keep my mournful vigils lone
"And watch for him who from my side is gone.

XXX.

"Aye, watch, though all my watching be in vain
"For one who never will keep tryst again.
"Still, when the wild winds through the forest sweep,
"Must I, from dreams awaking, sadly weep.
"In ears, which yearn to hear his voice again,
"The nuns' low chanting surely would be vain.
"It may not be; sharp anguish I have borne
"Yet never more my solemn vow forsworn.

XXXI.

"It bids me watch when others peaceful sleep,
"And smile when tears of blood my heart could weep;
"I hear it shouted on the stormy blast,
"And echoed by the river rushing past;
"The birds' gay carol sounds it in mine ear,
"The laughing spring-flowers seem to bring it near;
"Oft as I wander by the mountain streams
"My lost love's face from heaven approving beams.

XXXII.

"It gazes on me from the skies above
"And seems to bless me for my faithful love;
"Were I to pass within the convent door
"Perchance my love would come to me no more.
"It may not be. Others may find a home
"Within those walls; I must be free to roam;
"Aye! free to wander 'neath the Alpine sky
"Among the valleys lone, the mountains high.

XXXIII.

"Each crag, each torrent has its charm for me,
"In nature's face my Rudolph's face I see,
"Nor dare I venture where 'twere mortal sin
"If thought of Rudolph with me entered in."

Breathless the maiden paused; a flood of tears
Relieved her bosom and betrayed her fears,
Whilst from the old man's heart a heavy sigh
Was breathed, and misty grew his dark grey eye.

XXXIV.

"Daughter," he said, "I fain would give thee rest,
"Rest which brings comfort to the storm-tossed breast;
"Would that God's will, declared by me might prove
"To thee the fulness of Eternal Love!
"That I were gifted for thy soul's dear sake,
"With prophet's power; that so, I might awake
"Thy sleeping spirit from the fatal gloom
"Which holds thee captive since thy lover's doom.

XXXV.

"Yet if the spouse of Christ thou canst not be,
"Since from earth's love thy heart thou canst not free,
"From me shall no reproach nor bitter word
"Now, nor in after years be ever heard.
"Only waste not thy life in grieving vain,
"No prayers, no tears can bring him back again,
"And oh! far rather would I see thee wed,
"Than spending life thus mourning for the dead.

XXXVI.

"Lone is my lot," she said; "lone be it still
"Since he who loved me lies so far away;
"Well have I learnt 'tis not God's holy will
"That I should wed, nor will I wed to-day.
"If I have erred, Father, it may be so,
"In loving overmuch, then at God's sacred feet
"Will I abase myself, in sorrow kneeling low
"And His forgiveness for my fault entreat.

XXXVII.

"But never in the convent's quiet cell
"May I find refuge. In her Alpine home
"Annette will patiently, nay, gladly dwell,
"Nor ever from its shelter seek to roam.
"Too late for me the ties which others form,
"No sunshine can restore the faded flower,
"The pine tree blasted by the cruel storm
"Lies low where erst its stately head did tower.

XXXVIII.

"Thy blessing, Father, thou wilt not refuse
"E'en though 'tis asked by me, thine erring child,
"Who fain the path thou pointest out would choose,
"Yet cannot lull to rest her longings wild."

Lowly she knelt and on her drooping head
The Curé laid his hands: "God's peace be thine
"Poor child; God grant thy heart ere long be led
"To seek the comfort of His love divine!

XXXIX.

"Nor will I ever cease for thee to pray,
"Our blessed Master meekly to entreat
"That He would show me of His love the way
"To touch thy heart, to guide thine erring feet.
"Seek then thy chamber, there from all apart
"That can disturb thee, kneel in fervent prayer,
"Not with unwilling lips and doubting heart,
"But with full trust in God the Father's care.

XL.

"Ask Him to teach thee, as He only can,
"That earthly idols are but made of clay,
"That He alone can fill the heart of man,
"And, when He takes our joys from us away,
"'Tis not in wrath but rather in His love
"To wean us from this weary world of sin,
"To make us lay our treasures up above,
"And seek, through Christ, eternal life to win.

XLI.

"Farewell! I leave thee in His holy care.
"God of the fatherless, guide this Thy child!
"Wean her from thoughts that may her soul ensnare,
"Keep her, I pray Thee, ever undefiled.
"And bring her in Thine own good time to see
"Through these dark clouds Thy love-illumined face;
"To have no will but Thine, no God but Thee,
"Who art indeed the Giver of all grace."

XLII.

With faltering steps the old man went his way
Nor heeded aught until his home was won,
His chamber reached; there knelt he then to pray,
Nor tasted food until the day was done.
Wrestling in prayer, that he a soul might win,
And bring it to his Master's feet one day,
Cleansed from earth's dross, washed from all stain of sin,
Willing henceforth God's leading to obey.

XLIII.

Meantime, Annette, within her quiet room
Has knelt and tried true prayers to God to say;
Has sought to raise the heavy veil of gloom,
Which seems to hide His face when she would pray.

Then, moving gently through the house, soft tears
Drop from her eyes again and yet again,
And thronging come the mem'ries of past years.—
Will nothing ease or stupefy the pain?

XLIV.

She plies her wheel to drive sad thoughts away,
Fast does she spin, but thoughts fly faster still:
"Where is he? Can he see me here to-day?"
These are the thoughts which come against her will.
The songs of old, sung by his well-loved voice,
Seem filling now the heavy scented air:
"Rudolph!" she cries, "how can my heart rejoice,
"Till thou return'st, and answered is my prayer?"—

Song.

No convent wall, Rudolph, shall part
From thee thy widowed bride,
Vainly they seek to change my heart,
Faithful Annette will bide.

They bid me seek in lonely cell
  For peace and calm repose,
But free would Annette ever dwell,
  Aye, free as Alpine rose.

No vesper hymn, no chanted prayer
  Could make my heart rejoice,
They would but bring to my despair
  The echo of thy voice.

My long-lost love, where, where art thou?
  Would I were by thy side!
To thee I consecrate my life,
  Would I for thee had died!

XLV.

Who knocks at Annette's door? Breathless and spent
A mountain lad who far hath sped to-day
O'er crag, by torrent, on a message sent
To Annette: "Tarry not upon the way."
So urged his dying master: "Fain would I
"Have answer back; some kindly word to say,
"Her prayers are mine—if so, content I die
"And to a better world glad wing my way."

XLVI.

And Annette trembling, breaks the seal and reads
With tear-dimmed eyes and quickly coming breath;
Nor aught that passes near her sees nor heeds,
For well she knows the message heralds death.
Few are the words traced by the feeble hand,
Yet Annette lingers o'er them till at last
The mountain lad, impatient so to stand,
Speaks to her: "Maiden, time is ebbing fast,

XLVII.

"My master waits and I must swift return,
"He waits your answer on his dying bed,
"Low does the pulse of life within him burn,
"If long delayed perchance I find him dead."
Swiftly the maiden's dish of frugal fare
Before the weary messenger was placed,
Then with swift fingers yet with anxious care
Some earnest words upon the page she traced.

XLVIII.

"Bear back my message; to thy master go:
"Annette will for his soul's well-being pray,
"Within the village chapel kneeling low
"And fasting patiently till break of day."

Scarce by her pale lips had these words been said,
When like an arrow sent forth from bent bow,
With flying feet the mountain lad forth sped
And, from her door-step, Annette watched him go.

XLIX.

And wherefore was the maiden's bosom stirred
Within her? Why so strangely, sadly fraught
With pain the sudden tidings she had heard?
Why did her heart misgive her, overwrought?
"Annette," the dying man thus wrote, once more
"I send thee greeting. Ah! wert thou but here
"The sight of thee might even yet restore
"My life, and from thy hands such gift were dear.

L.

"It may not be. Beneath the Alpine sky
"Soon Ulric to his grave will slow be borne;
"Nor will he shrink nor find it hard to die
"If Annette for his early death will mourn.
"Well have I loved thee, though my love was vain,
"To thy lost love thou wert so nobly true,
"And now, Annette, a dying right I claim:
"The wealth thou would'st not share, I leave to you.

LI.

"Life's sand for me is ebbing, ebbing fast,
"Yet must I live till thou shalt send reply,
"Soon will the bitter pangs of death be past,
"And mourned by Annette happy shall I die.
"No wife I leave, since thou I love so well
"No love returned'st, Ulric has dwelt alone;
"And, when for me is tolled the funeral knell
"No wife bereaved, no child shall make sad moan.

LII.

"Take thou, Annette, the charge I leave to thee,
"Thine had it been, had'st thou but been my wife,
"As thou wast true to Rudolph's memory,
"So I to thee, throughout my span of life.
"Do with my legacy as seems thee best,
"But send no wand'rer helpless from thy door,
"Let Annette's home henceforth be peace and rest,
"A happy refuge for the sick and poor."

LIII.

And Annette, thinking but of him who lay,
Waiting her answer with fast failing breath,
Could but the dying man's behest obey,
And send kind answer to the house of death.

"Ulric," her answer ran, "my prayers are thine,
"Whether God wills that thou should'st live or die,
"Long will I kneel before His holy shrine
"And offer up my prayer to Him on high.
"Nor will Annette refuse thy last bequest,
"In which each suffering heart shall have a share,
"Thy wealth shall give the weary wand'rer rest
"And all shall learn 'tis theirs by Ulric's care.
"In peace, true friend, depart to that fair shore;
"Where endless peace awaits the blessed dead,
"Where vain regrets are stilled for evermore,
"And sorrow bows no more the drooping head.
"Nor dread thou, Ulric, last of all thy race
"That for thee sorrow's tear will not be shed,
"Long will all miss thee from th' accustomed place,
"Long will be mourned in thee the noble dead.
"Ulric, farewell. "*Annette.*"

LIV.

All day within the chapel Annette stayed,
Lowly she knelt with soul absorbed in prayer
In sorrow deep all fervently she prayed
That God of His great love divine would hear.

LV.

Another morn has dawned and sadly sped,
When with slow step came one unto her cot:
"Ulric," he said, "is with the happy dead
"For his soul's health to pray forget thou not."

LVI.

Ulric is dead and rumours strange are heard
That Annette heiress is to countless gold;
Strange things are said and stranger still inferred,
All save the truth by rumour has been told.
Meantime our Annette, though with heart sore grieved,
Has sought the Curé, told him Ulric's will
And kind advice from him, good man, received
How works of charity her life should fill.

LVII.

Large sums of money in his care she placed
For helpless sufferers to herself unknown,
Who by his never-failing kindness traced,
No more were left to pine in want alone.
So, by God's blessing, Ulric's last bequest
Proved to Annette a source of holy joy,
Bringing her storm-tossed soul a perfect rest,
A happiness untinged by earth's alloy.

BOOK III.

FIFTY YEARS AFTER.

I.

LONG years have passed and many changes wrought;
White as her native peaks is Annette's head,
Bowed too the form late with such beauty fraught,
And dimmed the eyes which bitter tears have shed.
Yet lovely still the softly tinted cheek
Where once the blushes flitted to and fro,
And beautiful indeed the spirit meek
Which strove to do and did God's work below.

II.

From that same hour when Ulric died, her grief
For Rudolph changed, and in her gentle breast
These thoughts by slow degrees brought calm relief:
"God doeth all things surely for the best,

"Grief long indulged for grief's own sake is wrong.
"Arouse thee, scarce thy life has yet begun.
"Awake! sad heart, awake! and be thou strong,
"By idle dreaming no true peace is won."

III.

And now within the glen, men saw uprise
A stately hospital, where to and fro
Went Annette, daily, and a vast surprise
Filled every heart as still they watched it grow.
Completed now, the board was duly spread
And thither flocked in crowds the poor and old,
There were the naked clothed, the starving fed,
The darkened soul of God the Father told.

IV.

Beside the sufferer on his weary bed
She stood with skilful hands that brought relief,
Smoothing the pillow 'neath the aching head
And whispering holy words to soothe his grief.
Teaching the sinking heart to God to cry
For aid and succour from His heavenly care,
Guiding the wayward will to seek on high
For peace and comfort in its vast despair.

V.

None leave that shelter crushed by stern despair,
For all are aided in their hour of need;
On each and all Annette bestows a share,
Kind sympathy is theirs in word and deed.
All leave her asking blessings on her head,
And, as with lingering steps they slow depart,
From aged eyes the grateful tear is shed
And prayers for her arise from many a heart.

VI.

Thus passed her days in deeds of love for Him
Who gave her being; and the voice of fame
(Though changed her beauty by long years grown dim)
Carried throughout the land her well-loved name.
No longer brooding in her gentle breast,
O'er sorrows past and joys that might have been,
No longer by a sense of wrong oppressed,
Beloved and loving, Annette grew serene.

VII.

The village maidens oft with eager tone
Would tell her tales of some beloved one,
Sure of her help they would some error own,
And by her counsel aided folly shun.

To every grief she lent an ear; anger swift fled
At her approach; storms were replaced by calm;
By gentleness the wayward heart was led,
And sympathy she gave as healing balm.

VIII.

But ever as her fame increased, more meek
Her spirit grew. "Not mine, O God, but Thine
"The glory; fain would I Thy kingdom seek,
"Guide me and bring me there in love divine."
So murmured oft the pale lips as in prayer
She knelt; and ever seemed some gracious sign
Vouchsafed towards her, showing her God's care
And ever did His meaning clearer shine.

IX.

So blessing others, she herself was blessed;
Each cottage hailed the day on which she came,
Feeding the hungry, bringing peace and rest
To wearied hearts and souls bowed down by shame.
Her sweet voice oft the hardened heart could move,
Telling of pardon for the contrite one,
Showing the mercy and the tender love
Of God who gave for us His only Son.

X.

Is Rudolph then forgotten? Ah! not so.
When through the air the Lauwine's peal is heard,
Then in her chamber, Annette kneeling low
Feels every pulse within her bosom stirred.
When the dark pine trees, moved by every blast,
Rustle and make their melancholy moan,
Then Annette trembles, musing of the past
And faintly murmurs: "Rudolph! I am lone."

XI.

Oft as she knelt within the chapel fair,
The sunbeams falling on her silvered head,
The pale hands clasped in heartfelt, loving prayer,
For the soul's welfare of her long-lost dead,
She seemed to hear as one in dream, his voice
Telling her of a world to her unknown,
Whilst angel voices cried: "Rejoice! Rejoice!
"Soon shall God's glorious works to thee be shown."

XII.

"A perfect bliss awaits beyond the skies
"The soul which pass unstained thro' this world's strife;
"Then shall God's throne entrance thy dazzled eyes,
"Then shalt thou taste God's gift—eternal life.

"Weep not, Annette, the love which in this sphere
"Was lost to thee for which thy spirit yearns,
"In heaven's own courts shall surely meet thee there,
"Fulfilled each hope for which the heart here burns.

XIII.

"There shalt thou meet the friends so long departed
"On whose behalf was murmured many a prayer,
"Round thee shall throng the one time weary hearted
"Who living owed so much to Annette's care.
"Rejoice, sad heart! soon wilt thou gain repose
"Beyond the skies, upon that blessed shore
"Where sorrow comes not and forgot are woes,
"Where bliss eternal waits thee evermore."

XIV.

Once more among the rugged crags at night
The fatal Lauwine's startling peal was heard,
The stars shone forth with clear and glittering light
And from the village not one hunter stirred.
The pine trees rustling made a dreary moan,
The foaming river dashed in fury by,
The startled chamois paced the mountains lone,
All nature felt some crisis drawing nigh.

XV.

What words are these which startle every heart?
Why turn the neighbours' faces pale with fear?
Why do they whispering stand in groups apart
As if some peril great were drawing near?
"The glacier moving! moving onward fast!"
Can this be true? Ah! fearful thought to all;
Recalling sorrows in the years long past
Which still have power the bravest to appal.

XVI.

Like some fierce spirit from its chain set free,
The wild wind raged and o'er the valley swept,
The frightened chamois shunned the falling tree
And swift from crag to rocky crag it leapt.
Weird was the night, on wakeful beds all lie
Till morn, when lo! the sun burst forth again,
A glorious rainbow spanned the smiling sky
And gently fell soft showers of April rain.

XVII.

With anxious hearts men wandered to and fro
Marking the havoc by the fierce storm wrought,
And e'en the aged wearily and slow
Their favourite haunts and sheltered gardens sought.

Upon a rustic seat, with heavy heart
An old man sat, and by his side there stood
A youthful maid with cherry lips apart,
And eyes which marked her grandsire's restless mood.

XVIII.

"'Twas in a storm like this," the old man sighed,
"That Rudolph, save his soul! was hapless lost;
"Ah! well I mind the very day he died,
"And how his sweetheart's life it almost cost."—
"Is it then true?" she asked, "this tale of woe
"The neighbours tell? Did Annette's lover die?
"And did she really to the mountains go
"To look, but look in vain, where he might lie?

XIX.

"And did she mourn him, weeping bitter tears?
"And did he perish on their wedding morn?
"And has she faithful been through all these years,
"Faithful, poor soul, though utterly forlorn?
"Well may we all on her set precious store,
"For well we know the love and tender care
"Which draw the sick and sad around her door
"Sure of her bounty all may claim a share.

XX.

"She seems so happy, who could guess that woe
"Had been her lot for long, long, weary years,
"That from those peaceful eyes could ever flow
"A fountain deep of unavailing tears?
"If she so loved and mourned him as you say,
"How is it that her face looks almost glad?
"Have years had power to take such grief away
"And joyful make the life which erst was sad?"

XXI.

Tears checked the maiden's speech, her grandsire smiled
An April smile; he stroked her golden hair:
"The young are all alike," he mutter'd low,
"Of love and lovers child in time beware.
"Long as this world moves on, with every breath,
"Shall anxious hearts with love and grief be wrung,
"And loving hearts shall quail before stern death,
"Which spares no age but strikes at old and young.

XXII.

"Fain would'st thou ask if Annette mourned her love?
"With tears of blood at first her love she wept;
"As mourns her mate the plaintive woodland dove,
"So Annette mourned and saddest vigil kept.

"Too young thou art to know what grief may mean,
"Too young to dread a long life passed alone,
" Long years may sooth a sorrow ne'er so keen,
" And hush, at last, a sufferer's piteous moan.

XXIII.

" But now, she passed me with a friendly smile,
" On to the chapel taking slow her way;
"There will she kneel with sorrowing heart awhile
" For Rudolph's welfare and herself to pray—
" What sound is this which through the air resounds?
" 'Tis fraught with horror to mine aged ear—
" Yet not like this the Lauwine surely sounds,
" 'Tis din of voices coming ever near.

XXIV.

"What means this crowd, what words are these they say?
" Palsied my limbs, my heart beats fast with fear;
" Nearer they come, alas! the weary day,
" Which finds me helpless, sitting idly here!
" 'The glacier! Rudolph!' that is what they said.
" What mean they maiden? Dizzy grows my brain.
" The glacier slipping! Rudolph?—Rudolph's dead!
" No glacier slip will bring him back again.

XXV.

"Annette, they whisper, what of her?—In prayer
"She lowly kneels with reverent, drooping head,
"Not one of yon brave hearts would surely dare
"To open wounds which have so deeply bled.
"Alas! a child has told the tale, behold
"Her hurrying footsteps, raised the grief-bowed head."
"What tale is this," she cries, "the child hath told?
"Whom mean ye, neighbours, by 'The long-lost dead'?

XXVI.

"Why speak ye not? For what then are ye come?
"In woe and suffering Annette shared your grief.
"Oh God! these men are they then stricken dumb?
"Will none amongst you come to my relief?"—
Throughout the crowd one sobbing cry arose,
From old and young upon the ear it fell,
Breathed forth from hearts inured to many woes,
Solemn its echo as a funeral knell.

XXVII.

The very children stayed their eager feet
[illegible] the crowd with slow and faltering pace
[illegible] stepped Annette to meet
[illegible] sadly in her grief-worn face,

"For fifty years," he said, "has now lain dead,
"The lover whom thy fond heart fain had wed;
"Hid from thy sight within a nameless grave,
"For half a century has lain the brave.

XXVIII.

"He who once wandered by our native stream,
"And chased the chamois by the moon's soft beam,
"Whose step ne'er faltered 'mid the snow peaks high,
"Was yet in youth's bright noon foredoomed to die.
"No maiden sure was more forlorn than thou,
"Widowed in heart ere pledged the marriage vow!
"All mourned his death, all felt for Annette's woe,
"Our Alpine rose, laid in her first youth low.

XXIX.

"For weeks, nay months we feared thy feeble life
"Would leave thee, conquered by the fever's strife;
"God gave thee back, a hostage to our care,
"The answer surely to our constant prayer.
"From that sick bed, watered by bitter tears,
"Have sprung the good deeds of thy later years;
"Throughout the land is borne thy sainted fame
"With blessings coupled is thy well-known name.

XXX.

"The good deeds which thy loving hand hath wrought,
"By mothers to their lisping babes are taught—
"All love thee—turn not then so deadly pale,
"Whilst I relate to thee the wondrous tale,
"Which fills each heart and ties the stam'ring tongue
"Lest Annette's heart should by rash speech be wrung.
"And if I pain thee, this at least believe
"Gladly would I the task to others leave.

XXXI.

"Perchance, kind friend, thou mayest not have seen
"How swift of late the glacier's course has been—
"But anxious ears have marked strange sounds afar,
"And anxious eyes have watched by sun and star,
"Have noted well-known signs, the truth revealing,
"Have seen the ice-cold glacier onward stealing:
"Poor heart! which long hast wept thy lover's doom,
"Call up thy courage! found at last his tomb!"

XXXII.

"His tomb!—Rudolph restored!—my long-lost dead?
"Lead on, kind neighbours! sure to day we wed!
"The Edelweiss he sought Annette will wear,
"Entwined by Rudolph in her nut-brown hair.

"Haste thee, Annette!—Why falter thus my feet?
"Gaily I go my long-lost love to meet.
"A bride's behest all hearts will sure obey,
"Haste! haste, my friends, nor tarry on the way."

XXXIII.

Unaided, followed by the weeping throng,
On towards the mountains Annette swept along,
With eyes which shone with fever's lustrous light
Nor paused, until a fresh group came in sight.
What are they watching, closing thus around?
What is the meaning of this rush profound?
With startled looks they moved in haste aside—
Once more have met the bridegroom and the bride!

XXXIV.

There lay the lover, mourned by Annette's heart,
With calm face turned towards the azure sky,
With eyes soft closed and ruddy lips apart
As if they just had breathed a lover's sigh.
The pine trees waved above his youthful head,
The sun's bright rays in glory slanted down,
The trembling people stood beside the dead,
And from their height th' eternal Alps looked down,

XXXV.

Silent as one appalled she stood, no word
Fell from the pale lips, only dumb surprise
Showed on her face; one choking sob was heard
As round the crowd she looked with anguished eyes.
Silent each one with bated, struggling breath,
None dared to speak, none dared her eyes to meet
To tell her gently this alas is death!
"The cruel snow has proved his winding sheet."

XXXVI.

Hark! hark! the convent bell is slowly heard,
The light flames up in Annette's eyes once more,
Some memory hath sure her pulses stirred
With loving looks she leans her bridegroom o'er.
Soft is the love light in her tender eye,
Bright are the blushes flitting to and fro,
From the full heart breathes now a gentle sigh,
And from her lips unsealed the words swift flow.

XXXVII.

"Rudolph!" she cried, "why say they thou art dead?
"The moon shines fair, arise and Annette wed!
"See ye the Edelweiss in his cold hand?
"Neighbours, why weeping thus around me stand?

"Long years have passed, long years of grief and pain
"But now I smile for he has come again.
"Not one can show a bridegroom half so brave;
"Rudolph, thine eyes unclose, rise from thy grave.

Song.

Speak, O my hunter love!
  Dead in thy bloom,
Snow white thy wedding garb,
  Ice-cold thy tomb.

Hush now the wedding peal,
  Stir not his sleep,
Vigil Annette keeps here,
  Why do ye weep?

XXXVIII.

"This is not Rudolph; see, my hair is white;
"With age and sorrow scarce I see aright.
"My cheeks are blanched, meet colour for the tomb
"And his are bright as ripe-fruit in its bloom.
"My form is bowed while his is straight and fair,
"What idle tale is this all hearts to scare?
"Not thus with silent lips Rudolph would meet
"The bride he wooed with words so strangely sweet!

XXXIX.

"No lover this of Annette's, woe the day
"Which sees my fond hopes melt and fade away.
"Yet once my Rudolph looked like this. 'Twas when
"We wandered for the last time through the glen,
"And silent watched the sunset's radiant glow
"Crowning with light the tall crags tipped with snow;
"But since that night long years have sadly sped,
"'Tis fifty years to-day since we were wed!

XL.

"Alas, not wed; for on the wedding morn
"Annette was left a widowed bride forlorn:
"What say ye, neighbours? Wand'ring grows my brain,
"I strive to hear your kind words, strive in vain;
"If this is Rudolph, then let Annette die.
"Why should the living in that ice tomb lie?
"Why should the young sleep on in silence drear,
"The aged linger in her suffering here?
"Speak, my lost love! wilt thou thy Annette wed?"
One bitter cry, she lies beside her dead.

XLI.

Back through the village passed the mournful train
Bearing the lovers who have met again,
Nor paused till on her couch Annette is laid
And honour to the dead is duly paid.
No sign she gives though all around are weeping
Silent she lies, O can it be but sleeping?
A smile is on her face of heaven she's dreaming,
Whilst kindly eyes that watch with tears are streaming.

XLII.

The sun has set, and in the dark blue sky
The stars gleam forth and in their radiance vie
Each with the other, and the glittering light
Shines through a lattice window clear and bright.
Annette sighs gently, wakes from out her sleep
And marks the forms who round her vigil keep.
"Rudolph is found," she cries, "God's love divine
"Answers each prayer we lay before the shrine.

XLIII.

"Long have I waited for this blessed day,
"My spirit yearns to speed from earth away,
"My prayers fulfilled, joy reigns within my breast,
"Together now Rudolph and I will rest.

"In life divided, in our death we'll wed,
"Let no one mourn, let not one tear be shed.
"Toll now for us the solemn passing bell,
"Farewell kind neighbours, Annette loves you well.

XLIV.

"For you she prays, prays with fast-ebbing breath,
"That God may stand beside your bed of death.
"Trust in His mercy, never will it fail,
"The Sun of Righteousness can never pale:
"The sting of death is sin, against that fight,
"Not in your own strength, but God's glorious might.
"Upward and onward till your task is done,
"The river crossed, the many mansions won.

XLV.

"I see the Golden Gates unclosing wide,
"May they not close till all are safe inside!
"Within those portals wait us joys untold,
"The sapphire throne—the sea of moltén gold—
"My lost love found, my work on earth thus blessed
"Take me, O Father, home at last to rest!"
One little sigh, the gentle spirit fled:
The neighbours hush their sobs and bless the dead.

XLVI.

The last sad offices in silence paid,
In snowy shroud her fragile form's arrayed,
And in her hand they place a single spray
Of Edelweiss upon the burial day.
With Alpine rose the children strew the road,
Which to the chapel led from her abode;
No voice was heard throughout that mournful day
Except in praise of her who silent lay.

XLVII.

With sorrowing hearts and faces dimmed by gloom
They laid the lovers in one quiet tomb.
Long years have passed and by that simple grave
The pine tree rustles o'er the loved and brave;
And lovers, trysting there, by twilight meet,
And o'er that moss-grown mound their troth repeat;
And pray that happily they may be wed
Nor share the lot which met the happy dead.
And still, when winter nights wax long and cold,
This tale by many a cottage hearth is told.

Who called thee strong as Death?

Who call'd thee strong as Death, O love?
Mightier thou wast and art.

FELICIA HEMANS.

THE ideal life how fair it seems, for lovers surely made;
How can the young and happy dream that love will ever fade?
"For ever will it last," they cry, "to be our souls' delight!"
Nor list they to the warning voice—"Your sun will set ere night."
Hast thou not marked, when skies shone blue and all around seemed bright,
Some tiny cloud we deemed too small to quench the gay sunlight?
Yet as we watched, it wider grew, ere we could shelter gain,
Loud peals of thunder echoed near, and fiercely fell the rain.

No sorrow clouds the hearts of *two* who sit beside the blaze,
While bright the ashen faggot glows beneath their dreamy gaze;
What is the world to them? a dream! youth's dreams are ever fair,
And love, sweet love with outspread wings, is fondly hovering there.
Why think of clouds? no shade of grief has interrupted yet
The sunshine which has wrapped in bliss those two since first they met;
Their hearts are pledged, along life's road together will they go,
Together will they meet their fate, be it or weal or woe.

"For weal or woe," she said, "my love, go bravely forth to-day,
"Nor let my soldier feel one pang of sorrow or dismay;
"In thee I trust, to thee I now my heart and life confide,
"Had I *one* doubt, unworthy I, to be thy chosen bride.

"Go forth where honour calls—thy home awhile a foreign land—
"Well do I know thou wilt return to claim my promised hand."
One kiss, one fond, last lingering look, and silently they part,
Severed for long, long years, yet *one* united soul and heart.

Fast speed the years with those who go, but, ah! for those who stay,
Slow drag the wheels of time and slow each dull hour wears away;
Fond letters, full of lover's hopes, came o'er the seas to cheer,
For love's sweet words from one afar are to sad hearts most dear.
None saw, or heeded, if they saw, the cloud creep o'er the sky—
If skies be bright, if hearts be light, who heeds that storms are nigh?
"'Tis but a passing cloud," we say, "which hides awhile the light,"
Nor mark the lengthening shadows fall which herald in the night.

Oft doth the weary heart its load of sorrow bravely bear,
Nor droops beneath the weight until relief is drawing near;
At last, at last, fulfilled the hope for which we pray and wait,
The joy deferred is ours now, but ours, O God, too late!
Too late! too late! sad words which haunt us from our very birth,
In every heart they find a home, and echo through the earth;
Yet not too late if we have borne in faith the suffering past,
And pressed with loving lips the cross—the crown will come at last.

Not *one* amongst us all had heard our darling e'er complain,
Yet paler grew the gentle face when spring flowers bloomed again;
The pensive brow was pensive still, the eyes shone clear and bright,
How could we dream their radiant glow was not of this world's light?

And often from her lips there fell the saddest, sweetest song—
"When will he come? my love, my love, why tarries he so long?
"Oh sea! bear back my love to me across the surging foam,
"Bear back my loving soldier lad, to me, to friends and home!"

And *he*, so loved, on deck he stood, a soldier tall and strong,
Watching the good ship make its way, watching the whole day long.
"Ere many hours are pass'd," mused he, "her heart will be at rest,
"And I shall fold her in my arms and clasp her to my breast;
"My patient one, so long beloved, soon shall I reach thy side,
"Soon shall the marriage bells peal forth, and thou shalt be my bride.
"Sail on good ship, she waits at home, at home she waits forlorn,
"Nor dreams, with her, her soldier love, will be to-morrow morn."

* * * * *

Wedding Chimes.

SILVER bells ringing, sweet voices singing,
All hail to the bride!
Long was *he* ranging with love so unchanging,
Who walks by her side.

April skies smiling, sunshine beguiling,
All hail to the bride!
With love so unchanging, long was *he* ranging,
Who walks by her side.

Fair children singing, bright flowers flinging,
All hail to the bride!
Long was *he* ranging with love so unchanging,
Who walks by her side.

Arrayed in bridal white she stood, with her attendant train,
The eager crowd, on every side, parted, then closed again,
As through the churchyard, up the aisle, she passed, a picture fair,
Whilst one soft ray of sunshine fell upon the dark brown hair—

One single gleam, fit emblem it of her brief wedded life—
The words were said, the vows were pledged, she was at last *his wife;*
Together down the aisle they went and through the old church door,
Softly he whispered tender words—"My wife for evermore."

So from her childhood's home she went, a loving happy bride,
With him, her heart's beloved one, her bridegroom at her side;
And for a transient while the sun shone brightly in the sky,
None marked the shadows onward creep, none dreamt that storms were nigh.
The guardian spirit of his home, dearer than his own life,
Blest tie is that which thus unites a husband and a wife!
Call that not love which homage pays at every passing shrine,
But for the love that *never* fails, I deem that love divine.

* * * * *

"Oh bear me home," the pale wife said, "once more,
"Ere yet my summer life is past and o'er,
"Let me awhile within my own home dwell
"And bid to all I love my last farewell.
"Time flies so fast with me! I may not stay
"The hand which beckons me from earth away.
"I think my life is numbered now by hours;
"I fade from earth as fade the pale spring flowers,
"Which bloom so bright and fair at dawn of day
"And ere the sun has set have passed away.
"Then bear me home to die, for I would fain
"The dear familiar faces see again;
"And read the old love in beloved eyes,
"Ere yet my spirit flits beyond the skies."
And home they brought her, in the lovely spring
When nature smiles and soft-voiced thrushes sing;
When violets breathe their sweetness on the air,
And primrose buds are peeping everywhere.
They bore her through the spots she loved so well,
And as she passed she breath'd her last farewell;
They bore her gently home, in peace to rest,
A weary bird within a sheltered nest.

SOFTLY the death bell toll
For a departed soul;
A spirit now hath fled,
The form we loved is dead.
Toll, softly toll,
For a departed soul.

Sweetly a requiem sing,
A soul hath taken wing;
Calm is the gentle face,
Touched with an angel's grace.
Sweetly a requiem sing,
A soul hath taken wing;

Slowly the coffin bear
Unto the churchyard near;
The weary one at rest,
Her spirit with the blest!
Flowers, sweet flowers bring,
Whilst we our requiem sing.

Forth to the battle field again, the arena stern of life,
The soldier turned and valiantly did he maintain the strife.
Few guessed the cheerful mien and voice were but an acted part,
The ready smile, a veil, to hide the breaking of his heart.
O'er pebbles smooth the little brook ripples with music gay;
No sound the silent river makes, as it pursues its way.
The deepest wounds no stranger's eye, by outward signs, can read,
Unceasingly they pierce the heart, and silently they bleed.

* * * * *

Finis.

"FIRE the last salute, my men,
"O'er our comrade on his bier!
"Soldiers, fall in, fall in, nor scorn
"To wipe away a tear,
"For we lay to-day in the silent grave
"A comrade we've proved to be leal and brave.

"Hark! the neigh of his favourite steed, 'Ranee,'
"As she walks in the mournful train!
"In vain will she wait for the cheery voice
"And the master's hand on the rein!
"For we lay to-day in the silent grave
"A comrade we've proved to be leal and brave.

"Fire the last salute, my men!
"We have left him by the side
"Of his cherished love who lay lonely there—
"His unforgotten bride.
"Together they rest in their early grave,
"The loved and the loving, the good and brave."

Fifty Years ago this Christmas Eve.

BESIDE the clean-swept hearth they sat,
  Each in an old arm-chair;
Their hair was silvery white from age,
  Their limbs bowed down with care.
Yet pleasant smiles lit up each face
As they sat in the chimney-place.

The old man spoke. "True wife," he said,
  "'Tis fifty years to-day
"Since first I courted you, and stole
  "Your faithful heart away;
"And every day of my past life
"I've thanked God that you are my wife.

"I mind so well your rosy cheeks,
"Your hair of russet brown,
"Your merry smile, your roguish ways,
"I mind your very gown;
"'Twas grey, with little spots of green,
"The prettiest dress I'd ever seen.

"I met you in the old Hall lane,
"Just by the squire's gate,
"And all at first you'd say to me
"Was: 'John it's very late;'
"But ere we parted, I confess,
"I'd won my wife, you answered: 'Yes!'"

Then next she spoke, a little smile
Lit up the kind old face;
The bands of silver hair but seemed
To add a further grace,
A crown of glory to the wife,
Whose husband blessed her all his life.

"I mind you, too, old man," she said,
"Though fifty years have passed,
"And though our days upon the earth
"Are surely ebbing fast;
"I mind the very words you said,
"I mind your smart cravat of red.

"I saw you first, my heart beat fast,
"I longed to run away,
"But though I trembled when we met,
"I could not choose but stay.
"'Annie,' you whispered, 'be my wife,
"'I'll love you darling, all my life.'

"And never since that happy day
"That you and I were wed
"Have I repented, dear old John,
"The 'yes' I shyly said,
"On Christmas Eve in dim twilight,
"Just fifty years ago to-night."